

Open Ended Working Group on Reducing Space Threats through Norms, Rules and Principles of Responsible Behaviours

Agenda Item 6c

Topic 1: Norms, Rules and Principles Derived from Existing International Legal and Other Normative Frameworks

Statement by the United Kingdom

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Mr Chair,

Firstly, let me thank you and the team for providing us with an interesting agenda for this week's discussions. I am sure it will provoke useful exchanges amongst Member States. The UK team is looking forward to sharing our views and listening to what everyone has to say.

Thank you too for the elements paper which you circulated a couple of weeks ago. Overall, we think the paper captures very well the flavour of the discussions we have had in our first two meetings. We will provide specific comments in writing by your deadline.

The UK has also circulated a Working Paper setting out our proposals for norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours, which we hope will be reflected in the final report of the OEWG. The UK paper can be found on the OEWG webpage as document A/AC.294/2023/WP.4.

Mr Chair,

Let me make some remarks concerning the first topic on our agenda: Norms, Rules and Principles Derived from Existing International Legal and Other Normative Frameworks.

I would like to start by recognising that geopolitical tensions and strategic competition between states are intensifying. And it is this situation that is driving the development of counter-space capabilities, which can be used to threaten space systems.

The existing international legal and normative framework is an important tool in helping us to manage this situation and avoid tensions inadvertently escalating into conflict.

A significant body of law already exists to promote the peaceful exploration and use of space by States, centred on the Outer Space Treaty.

Compliance with the Outer Space Treaty contributes to maintaining international peace, security and stability in general as well as helping promote an open, secure, stable, accessible, sustainable and peaceful use of space itself.

The Outer Space Treaty is also clear in Article 3, that wider international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, is applicable to all activities by States in the exploration and use of outer space.

This also includes International Humanitarian Law, which is applicable to space operations conducted pursuant to or in furtherance of armed conflict. The recognition of this fact does not increase the likelihood of conflict in space. On the contrary, acknowledging that such space operations are regulated by International Humanitarian Law, which affords legal protection to civilians and civilian objects (including civilian space objects), is more likely to promote restraint.

Mr Chair,

In addition to the legal framework, existing standards and guidelines agreed by States at the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and other fora also provide a valuable contribution to space security.

Setting general benchmarks of safety or sustainability for space operations makes it easier to identify irresponsible or threatening behaviour, which may deviate from these standards.

Defence and security actors in space can also help reduce misperceptions by acting in accordance with generally agreed guidelines for safe and sustainable space operations, such as the [Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines](#) and the [Guidelines for the Long-term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities](#) of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space.

Recognising the contribution that COPUOS can make to space security does not imply that the issues we are discussing in the OEWG should fall under the remit of COPUOS. For example, the security community can support the safety and sustainability agenda through agreeing limits on destructive testing of Direct Ascent Anti-Satellite missiles but discussion of norms to limit missile testing belong squarely in the First Committee.

Thank you Mr Chair.

ENDS